Notes on 1988 DBQ Documents on Decision to Drop Atomic Bomb

Background info:

* Manhattan Project
* Russian invasion of Japan undesirable
* German carpet bombing of civilian targets
* Germany surrendered unconditionally
* Germans were working on the bomb
* Russians might be working on one
* Need to show Russia our power
* Roosevelt dead, Churchill out of power, Truman doesn’t know Stalin
* Iwo Jima – Japanese fought to end for a sulphurous rock
* Okinawa – worst Pacific fighting
* Japanese culture views surrender as shameful and worse than death
* USSR occupied North Korea. NK went communist/socialist.

Some things to consider about the documents:

* Were they written at the time of the event or afterward?
* If afterward, could they be expressing a popular opinion after the fact?
* Is the communication private thoughts and conversations of the major actors or a public declaration intended for mass consumption?

Essential question: Diplomatic measure to intimidate Soviets or military measure?

Document A: Author Sec. War Henry Stimson, 1947. Says Japanese military totals 5 million men. US will need 5 million to invade, expect 1 million casualties. War last at least until end of 1946. No mention of Russia or Japanese casualties. **Supports military objective for A-Bomb.**

Document B: General Arnold, Comm. Of Army Air Force, 1949. Already hit Japan with incendiaries and destroyed their industrial capacity, mines to prevent imports of supplies, over half a million Japanese people killed or wounded. Japan was in no position to “carry on a large-scale war.” “already on the verge of collapse.” **Supports diplomatic objective to intimidate USSR.**

Document C: Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower remembering his advice to Truman in 1945, written 1948. Expresses his concern about the USSR invading Japan. Implies U.S. needs to end the war before the USSR invades Japan. Believed Japan was about to collapse. **Supports diplomatic object to keep USSR out of Japan, preventing a future conflict with USSR.**

Document D: The Big 3 (Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin @ Yalta), Feb. 1945. They agree that if Russia helps enters help the Allies defeat Japan in China, then they have demands regarding Mongolia, Territory taken from USSR by Japan be returned, Open ports and Naval base to USSR, Cooperation between USSR and China. Nothing is mentioned about the Soviets occupying Japan. **I’m not sure this document in and of itself is evidence for either a diplomatic or military motive. It regards China, not Japan. It doesn’t restrict USSR from occupying Japan either.**

Document E: Winston Churchill remembering Potsdam 1945 in 1953. Receives news of A-bomb. Sees end to the war in Japan. Acknowledges that Russia no longer needed in war against Japan which will benefit Europe because Russian involvement in the East could complicate negotiations for settlement in Europe. Believes Americans are also thinking about this. **Supports both the military motive to end the war in the East and also to prevent USSR entry into the war against Japan.**

Document F: Nuclear physicist Leo Szilard remembers a 1945 meeting with James Byrnes and scientists in 1949. Discussed whether bomb should be used. Acknowledged that Japan was “essentially defeated.” Mr. Byrnes concerned about Russian influence in Europe and thinks bomb will “make Russia more manageable in Europe.” Szilard disagrees and thinks a diplomatic move to intimidate USSR is not a reason to drop the bomb on Japan. Note: Byrnes become Sec. of State and was present at Yalta. **Supports diplomatic motive to intimidate USSR to keep them from spreading their socialist influence in Europe at war’s end.**

Document G: Nuclear scientists report including Oppenheimer to Sec War, June 16, 1945. They discuss their debate about whether to drop the bomb as a demonstration or to actually use it on Japan. Some believe if they use it on Japan, they can save American lives AND prevent war in the future, implicitly by intimidation. **Supports military objective but also more strongly supports the idea that the intimidation of the USSR was being discussed as a possible motive.**

Document H: President Harry Truman, August 1945. He justifies the development and use of the A-bomb by saying we beat Germany to it and that we were getting revenge for Japan attacking us and treating our POWs badly. He also says we used it to shorten the war and would continue to use it until Japan surrenders. **Supports a military motive to end the war in Japan. However, a president’s actions and attitude is often designed to communicate more than the mere words. The document could be used to indicate to the Soviet’s what we could do to them if they disobey “international laws.”**